

The President's Daily Brief

15 December 1969

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Moscow West Germans. (Page 1)

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The Communists seem ready to step up the fighting in South Vietnam. (Page 2)

Coup in Panama. (Page 3)

Aspects of Soviet policy in the Middle East are discussed at Annex.

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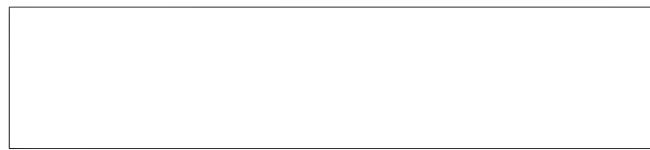
USSR - WEST GERMANY



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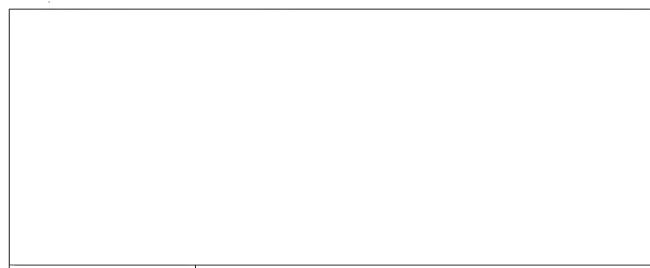
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SOUTH VIETNAM

A number of signs point to Communist plans to increase their military activity in the period before Christmas. [redacted]

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[redacted] renewed attacks will begin in mid-December and will be concentrated in Tay Ninh Province and the upper Mekong Delta region. [redacted] a line noted in captured documents [redacted] says the Communists intend to make the delta a primary battlefield during their winter-spring campaign.

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PANAMA

The chief of staff of the National Guard, Col. Sanjur, seized control of the Provisional Junta Government during the night. Guard Commandant General Torrijos is in Mexico on an informal visit, and will not be allowed to return. [redacted]

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NOTES

USSR-Egypt: [redacted]

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[redacted] the USSR promised the UAR "everything it asked for"--including arms--during the course of high-level Soviet-Egyptian talks in Moscow last week. The communiqué issued at the end of the visit did not provide a clear signal of such intentions. It did, however, refer to certain unspecified "practical steps" aimed at enhancing Soviet-Egyptian cooperation.

USSR - Communist China: The announcement that First Deputy Foreign Minister Kuznetsov and his deputy are returning to Moscow, ostensibly to participate in the coming session of the USSR Supreme Soviet, may signal a Soviet decision to downgrade its delegation to the talks in Peking. The Russians have been toying with this idea for some time; the other six members of the Soviet delegation are apparently remaining in Peking. A Chinese news agency statement on 13 December claimed, however, that the Soviet negotiators would be gone for only one week, and the talks would be "temporarily recessed in their absence." This appears to be a thinly veiled threat that the talks could break down completely if the two Russians do not return to Peking. Nevertheless, neither side has much to gain in allowing the talks to end at this time, and some compromise on this issue may still be arranged.

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THE SOVIETS AND THE FEDAYEEN

In the wake of Kosygin's careful promises of support to the Palestinians, we have reached the following conclusions about Soviet policy toward the fedayeen..

Two points stand out in Premier Kosygin's speech of 10 December: the high-level, official endorsement of the Arab fedayeen, and the seemingly contradictory emphasis on the need for a political settlement of the Arab-Israeli crisis.

For months the Soviets have been giving propaganda support to the fedayeen, along with small amounts of arms channeled through Arab governments or other third parties. Now, by Kosygin's remarks, the fedayeen are recognized as engaged in a "just national liberation struggle," a meaningful phrase in the Soviet lexicon. So engaged, the fedayeen must be given support.

How much support, and to what end, no Soviet has yet spelled out. The Soviets, however, have given every sign that they have mounted the fedayeen bandwagon with some reluctance. [redacted]

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[redacted] The Soviets' past behavior toward uncontrollable extremist groups shows that Moscow is uncomfortable in such company.

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The Soviets do not want to go through another June war, which the activities of the fedayeen could ultimately provoke. Thus, Moscow's support is given more than a little grudgingly, with a purely opportunistic view toward tactical advantage.

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The advantage of such a policy is clear. A pro-fedayeen posture revalidates Soviet credentials, in the Arab world and elsewhere, as the champion of revolutionary forces--these credentials lost some validity in June 1967. The fedayeen stand for the kind of resolute opposition to Israel most popular among the Arab people. The Soviets can ignore this only at great risk.

Just as important right now, however, is how Soviet support for the fedayeen--and for a certain level of Arab militancy in general--relates to the bargaining for a political settlement. Tension has been Moscow's handmaiden in the Middle East from the beginning of Soviet penetration there. The Soviets realize that the tension now being created by Arab militancy adds to the pressures on Israel--and on the US--to make concessions. The apparent contradiction between support for militancy and Kosygin's pointed reiteration of Moscow's intention to go on working for a settlement tends to fade when considered in this light.

Kosygin's speech is, in sum, a brief delineation of Moscow's dualistic strategy in the Middle East--arm for war, negotiate for peace. The Soviets are arming and backing the fedayeen, just as they have armed and backed Arab governments for years. In this connection, they are careful to keep their dealings with the fedayeen in line with the governments who are uneasy about the guerrillas. The Soviets also want a negotiated settlement--satisfactory to the Arabs, and yet allowing for Israel's existence--but they recognize the enormous obstacles. They cannot stand still, however, while the efforts to overcome these obstacles drag on.

We can expect more statements of support, more heavy propaganda, and perhaps increased clandestine supply of arms and financial aid to the fedayeen. We can also expect Soviet spokesmen to accent the danger inherent in the Middle East situation--as did the Warsaw Pact declaration last month. All these efforts are designed to give the negotiating advantage to Moscow and its friends, but without the intention of pushing the situation to the point of full-scale hostilities.

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